

## **THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN ALLEVIATING ISOLATION: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AGED PARENTS IN TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES IN PATHNAMTHITTA DISTRICT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The research delves into the impact of technology on alleviating social isolation among aged parents in Pathanamthitta District within the context of transnational families. With a focus on socio-economic status, technology usage patterns, emotional well-being, and challenges faced, the study reveals a demographic leaning toward ages 60-79, predominantly widowed and retired individuals. Findings indicate a significant adoption of smartphones, daily technology engagement, and improved emotional well-being through enhanced communication. Identified challenges include technical difficulties and health-related issues, prompting seven actionable suggestions for intervention. By drawing insights from various studies, the research contributes a nuanced perspective, providing a foundation for future initiatives to support aged parents in the evolving technological landscape.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Aged Parents, Technology Adoption, Social Isolation*

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### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the intricate tapestry of familial bonds, the impact of globalization and migration is increasingly palpable, reshaping the dynamics of families across the globe. Nowhere is this transformation more evident than in regions like Pathanamthitta District, where the migration of younger generations has left a significant demographic of aged parents grappling with solitude. As technological innovations continue to redefine the contours of human connection, this study endeavors to unravel the nuanced relationship between technology and the lives of aged parents in transnational families.

From traditional joint family structures to contemporary dispersed living arrangements, the essence of family life has evolved. Pathanamthitta, with its unique cultural milieu, serves as an intriguing backdrop to examine the challenges faced by aged parents, who, separated from their migrant children, navigate the complexities of aging within the confines of their homes. The present study elucidate the specific problems confronted by this demographic and underline the importance of investigating the role of technology as a potential antidote to their social isolation.

### **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The demographic landscape of Pathanamthitta District has undergone a pronounced shift, particularly in the context of migration trends. In contrast to the peak of Gulf migration, the current scenario reveals a noteworthy increase in migration

to the European Union, US, UK, Australia, and Canada. This surge is considerably higher in Pathanamthitta compared to other districts in Kerala. Moreover, a substantial number of natives from Pathanamthitta are opting for permanent citizenship in foreign countries. Notably, only 2.21 percent of the total students in Kerala hail from Pathanamthitta, indicating a decline in the district's educational participation.

Enrollment rates in schools have witnessed a decline, with 82,932 students currently enrolled, marking a decrease of 3,347 students from the previous academic year. The dwindling trend in student enrollment is particularly noticeable when juxtaposed with districts like Wayanad and Idukki, which share comparable forest cover. Alappuzha, the smallest district in Kerala, boasts a higher percentage of students (5 percent) compared to Pathanamthitta.

A national census conducted 12 years ago foreshadowed a decline in the population of Pathanamthitta District, with the population density experiencing a notable decrease. In 2011, the population dwindled from 12.34 lakhs to 11.95 lakhs, prompting a reduction in legislative constituencies from seven to four. Students from Pathanamthitta exhibit a prominent inclination toward studying abroad, with a substantial number opting for foreign universities directly after completing their 12th-grade exams. This migration trend extends beyond students to include professionals, such as engineers and nurses.

The impact of migration is further evidenced by lower enrollments in higher secondary education, dropping from 11,332 students in the previous academic year to 11,000 in the current year. The acute shortage of students has led to the discontinuation of a plus-one batch in Malayalapuruzha and Elanthoor, underscoring the multifaceted challenges faced by the district.

### **1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Against the backdrop of these demographic shifts and migratory patterns, this study gains heightened significance in unraveling the implications for the aged parents left behind in Pathanamthitta. The dwindling population and altered educational dynamics signal broader societal transformations, prompting an urgent exploration of the challenges faced by the elderly in this changing landscape. Understanding the socio-economic status of aged parents in the context of increased migration becomes paramount, considering the unique demographic patterns of Pathanamthitta. The investigation into technology usage among aged parents in this district gains added relevance, offering insights into the tools and platforms they employ for communication in an increasingly connected yet fragmented world.

The emotional and psychological impact of technology on aged parents, particularly in fostering a sense of connectedness with migrant children, takes on heightened significance in this context. As the district witnesses a shift in familial structures and traditional support systems, the study endeavors to shed light on how technology serves as both a challenge and a potential solution for the emotional well-being of the elderly. Identifying challenges and barriers faced by aged parents in Pathanamthitta, specifically related to technology use in alleviating social isolation, holds implications not only for the local community but also contributes to a broader understanding of the dynamics at play in regions experiencing similar demographic shifts. In the face of declining enrollments and discontinuation of educational batches, the study underscores the need to explore avenues for support and connection, offering potential pathways for community initiatives, policy adjustments, and technological interventions that can enhance the quality of life for aged parents left behind in transnational families.

## **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To understand the socio-economics status of aged parents in Pathanamthitta District
2. To Investigate the technology usage patterns among aged parents in Pathanamthitta, specifically focusing on the devices and platforms employed for communication
3. To examine the impact of technology on the emotional and psychological well-being of aged parents, particularly in terms of fostering a sense of connectedness with their migrant children.
4. To Identify and analyze any challenges or barriers faced by aged parents in Pathanamthitta when utilizing technology to alleviate social isolation, including issues related to access, affordability, or digital literacy.

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Honest effort is made to focus on the objectives under taken through collection of primary data. Primary data is collected mainly to get response among 50 respondents from Pathnamthitta District. A structured questionnaire has also been used for collecting primary data.

### ► Period of the study

The period of study was conducted in September 2023-December 2023

### ► Sample design

Sample of 50 respondents is selected from Pathnamthitta District on convenient sampling basis.

### ► Tools for analysis

Data are collected through questionnaire, classified and tabulated on different basis

## **Percentage Analysis**

Percentages are often used in data presentation for they simplify numbers, reducing all of them to a 0 to 100 range. Through the use of percentages of the data can be reduced in standard form with the base equal to 100, which facilitates relative comparison.

## **1.6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

- 20 respondents (33.3%) belong to the age group 60-69, 20 (33.3%) to 70-79, and 10 (16.7%) to 80+.
- Marital status: 19 respondents (31.7%) are married, and 31 (51.7%) are widowed. Others reported being divorced or specifying their status.
- Educational background: 32 respondents (53.3%) have completed high school, and 6 (10%) have a college/university education.
- Employment status: 47 respondents (78.3%) are retired, and 3 (5%) are employed.
- 31 respondents (51.7%) live alone, and 19 (31.7%) live with their spouses.
- Monthly income: 16 respondents (26.7%) earn between ₹10,000 - ₹20,000, and 16 (26.7%) earn above ₹30,000.

- Technology Adoption: 40 respondents (66.7%) own smartphones, while none own laptops/computers. All the respondents use technology daily.
- Communication preference: 45 respondents (75%) prefer messaging apps for communication. Challenges include technical difficulties (23 respondents), health-related issues (17 respondents), and limited access to devices (5 respondents).
- Emotional well-being: 39 respondents (65%) reported improved emotional well-being.
- Factors influencing well-being include frequency of communication (29 respondents) and a sense of togetherness (18 respondents).
- Suggestion for improvement: 33 respondents suggest training programs to enhance technology use. 17 respondents seek community support initiatives.

## 1.7 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study delves into the multifaceted relationship between technology and the lives of aged parents in transnational families, with a specific focus on Pathanamthitta District. The research aimed to achieve four key objectives: understanding socio-economic status, investigating technology usage patterns, examining the impact on emotional well-being, and identifying challenges faced by aged parents utilizing technology to alleviate social isolation.

The demographic profile reveals a varied yet insightful representation of aged parents in Pathanamthitta. Notably, a substantial proportion falls within the age range of 60-79, highlighting the relevance of the study in addressing the needs of this demographic. The majority being widowed emphasizes the potential isolation experienced by this group. Moreover, the high prevalence of retired individuals sheds light on the unique challenges faced by those in this age bracket. The findings underscore a significant adoption of technology among aged parents in Pathanamthitta. Despite the absence of laptop/computer ownership, the widespread use of smartphones and daily technology engagement signifies the integration of these devices into their daily lives. This supports the idea that technology can serve as a viable means of communication for this demographic.

The reported improvement in emotional well-being among the majority of respondents aligns with the study's third objective. The sense of togetherness and increased frequency of communication, facilitated by technology, emerges as key contributors to this positive shift. The emotional well-being aspect reinforces the potential of technology to bridge emotional distances and enhance the quality of life for aged parents.

Challenges, though present, are not insurmountable. Technical difficulties and health-related issues stand out as notable barriers, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions. The call for training programs by a substantial number of respondents aligns with the study's objectives and signals an opportunity for community-driven initiatives. The suggestion for community support underscores the social nature of the challenges faced, indicating the importance of holistic support systems.

The results collectively emphasize the pivotal role technology plays in the lives of aged parents in Pathanamthitta, offering a potential solution to social isolation. The study not only contributes valuable insights into the specific dynamics of this demographic but also provides a foundation for future interventions and policies aimed at enhancing the well-being of aged parents in transnational families. As technology continues to evolve, the findings of this study offer a timely and

relevant perspective that can inform initiatives to create more inclusive and connected communities for the elderly in the context of transnational families.

### **.1.8 SUGGESTIONS**

1. Develop and implement targeted technology training programs specifically designed for aged parents in Pathanamthitta. These programs should focus on enhancing digital literacy, addressing technical difficulties, and promoting effective use of smartphones for communication.
2. Facilitate community-led workshops and support groups that provide a platform for aged parents to share their experiences, discuss challenges, and collectively explore solutions. This fosters a sense of community support and encourages mutual learning.
3. Introduce health awareness programs that address the specific health-related issues faced by aged parents using technology. This could include guidelines for maintaining physical well-being while engaging with digital devices and promoting regular health check-ups.
4. Establish community technology hubs equipped with devices and internet connectivity. These hubs can serve as accessible spaces where aged parents can come together, receive assistance, and engage in social interactions through technology.
5. Develop multilingual resources and support materials to address language barriers and enhance understanding of technology. This ensures that language does not become a hindrance to effective communication and utilization of digital tools.
6. Include financial literacy components in training programs to address potential affordability concerns. This empowers aged parents to manage their finances effectively, ensuring that the cost of technology does not become a barrier.
7. Promote awareness about mental health resources available online. Provide information on counseling services, mental health apps, and online communities that can offer emotional support to aged parents.

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